

Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

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AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 4942

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINR IN
SUBJECT: BIO DATA ON VIDYA SHANKAR, NEW PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO
THE PRIME MINISTER

REF: NEW DELHI 4685

1. ON APRIL 2 VIDYA SHANKAR, A RETIRED OFFICER OF THE
INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE (ICS), WAS NAMED PRINCIPAL SECRETARY
TO PRIME MINISTER DESAI.

2. DURING HIS LONG CAREER AS A CIVIL SERVANT, SHANKAR HAS
HELD MANY KEY POSITIONS IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND IN
THE STATES. HE IS REGARDED AS A HIGHLY CAPABLE ADMINISTRATOR.
HIS CHIEF DISTINCTION DATES BACK TO THE PERIOD (1946-50) WHEN
HE SERVED AS PRIVATE SECRETARY TO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
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AND HOME MINISTER SARDAR VALLABBHAI PATEL. SHANKAR
BECAME QUITE CLOSE TO PATEL AND BY HIS OWN ACCOUNT WAS
HEAVILY INVOLVED ASSISTING THE SARDAR IN THE INTEGRATION
OF THE PRICELY STATES INTO THE INDIAN UNION. HE ONCE
TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT HE HAD ACCUMULATED HIS OWN PAPERS
ON THIS CRUCIAL PERIOD OF INDIAN HISTORY AND HOPED
ONE DAY TO WRITE A BOOK. HE ULTIMATELY DID PUBLISH A TWO-VOLUME

ACCOUNT IN 1974.

3. PERHAPS BECAUSE OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH SARDAR PATEL, SHANKAR FEEL INTO DISFAVOR WITH PRIME MINISTER NEHRU IN THE EARLY 1950'S. HE ALSO INCURRED NEHRU'S ANGER WHEN HE TOOK A SECOND WIFE WHILE HIS FIRST ONE WAS STILL LIVING. IN EARLY 1954, SHANKAR WAS RELEGATED TO THE RELATIVELY MINOR POSITION OF COLLECTOR IN A DISTRICT IN THE OLD BOMBAY STATE. HE WAS LATER "REHABILITATED" THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF HIS FRIEND S. K. PATIL, THE LONG-TIME CONGRESS LEADER OF BOMBAY AND A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF SARDAR PATEL. PATIL ONCE REFERRED TO SHANKAR AS THE "BEST CIVIL SERVANT IN THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA".

4. CURRICULUM VITAE: THERE IS SOME DISPUTE AS TO SHANKAR'S EXACT BIRTHDATE. EMBASSY BIO DATA GIVES IT AS NOVEMBER 10, 1909, ALTHOUGH THE HISTORY OF SERVICE OF THE INDIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE LIST THE DATE AS FEBRUARY 27, 1909. HIS PLACE OF BIRTH WAS PRATAPGARH, UTTA PRADESH. SHANKAR BELONGS TO THE KAYASTHA COMMUNITY, WHICH FOR CENTURIES HAS PROVIDED ABLE CIVIL SERVANTS AND PROFESSIONAL PERSONS TO INDIAN SOCIETY. FOLLOWING EDUCATION AT ALLAHABAD UNIVERSITY AND ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE AT OXFORD, WHERE HE RECEIVED A M.A. DEGREE, SHANKAR WAS COMMISSIONED AS AN ICS OFFICER IN 1933. HE SERVED AS ASSISTANT COLLECTOR IN SEVERAL DISTRICTS IN BOMBAY STATE BEFORE BECOMING A SECRETARY TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT. FROM 1941 TO 1946, HE WAS A DEPUTY SECRETARY AND LATER UNDER SECRETARY IN THE GOI'S HOME DEPARTMENT. FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS HE WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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SARDAR PATEL'S PRIVATE SECRETARY. BEGINNING IN 1948 SHANKAR ALSO SERVED CONCURRENTLY AS A JOINT SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF STATES AND FROM 1952 TO 1954 AS A JOINT SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. FOR THE NEXT YEAR HE WAS COLLECTOR OF A DISTRICT IN RURAL BOMBAY STATE. SHANKAR THEN SERVED FROM 1955 TO 1958 AS SECRETARY IN THE REVENUE DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF BOMBAY. RETURNING TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, HE SERVED SUCCESSIVELY AS DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS, MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS (1958-1960); SPECIAL SECRETARY IN THE AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT, MINISTRY OF FOOD DEPARTMENT (1962-1964); AND SECRETARY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF AVIATION, MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS (1964-1966). WHILE IN THIS LAST POSITION SHANKAR WAS ALSO CHAIRMAN OF INDIAN AIRLINES CORPORATION AND CHAIRMAN OF THE HOTEL CORPORATION OF INDIA. FROM 1966 TO HIS RETIREMENT IN 1969 HE WAS SECRETARY TO THE DEFENSE MINISTRY.

5. PERSONAL DATA: AN EMBASSY OFFICER WHO WORKED CLOSELY WITH SHANKAR IN THE EARLY 1960'S DESCRIBED HIM AS A HARD-WORKING, TALKATIVE EXTROVERT WHO HAD A REPUTATION FOR GETTING THINGS DONE. ALTHOUGH QUITE WESTERNIZED, HE STRUCK ANOTHER EMBASSY OFFICER AS NOT BEING THE USUAL POLISHED ICS OFFICER. HE WAS DESCRIBED AS SOMEWHAT OVERWEIGHT AND UNKEMPT, GIVEN TO WEARING SANDALS WITH NO SOCKS, AND OCCASIONALLY INCLINED TO PICKING HIS TOES. HE HAS APPEARED TO BE FRIENDLY TOWARD THE US AND HAS BEEN CORDIAL TOWARD INDIVIDUAL AMERICANS. SHANKAR IS FOND OF SPORTS, PARTICULARLY TENNIS AND HORSEBACK RIDING. IN ADDITION TO HIS EXCELLENT ENGLISH, HE SPEAKS SEVERAL INDIAN LANGUAGES.
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